

# **JUFJ Partnership Forum**

## **Workshop Questions – The Challenge of Childcare**

**What key messages should the Scottish Government be aware of when considering future help for families?**

### **Governance and Priorities**

#### **National**

- Establishment of a Government Agency, at National level with overview of whole childcare sector (across all departments) to give a strategic and focussed approach to childcare provision.
- Joined up thinking – needs of children need to be considered alongside those of parents returning to work
- Need to challenge funders' perceptions, raise awareness of value of childcare (economic, social, educational)
- Quantity v Quality – any shift to large scale contracting should not compromise quality for quantity.

#### **Local**

- Need to achieve consistency of childcare service across the City of Edinburgh Council area - not in place currently
- Need to map local provision and quantify gaps eg in regeneration areas.
- Concern re recent cuts/collapse in provision and core funding eg WFF assisting families in Craigmillar finding alternatives when local services shut down
- More consultation/dialogue needed with parents (eg participative research)
- More collaborative working with Social Enterprise firms – eg Smilechildcare and Childcare Connections.
- Childcare needs to be accessible with funded places close to where people who need them most live, work, learn
- Joined up dialogue with public transport services needed re accessibility of childcare/education/workplaces

#### **Funding**

- Closer monitoring of how funds given to statutory bodies are spent.
- Need for transparency on how childcare grants/contracts are allocated and administered.
- Childcare Strategy and Sure Start funds must be ring fenced to avoid local authorities reallocating to offset other budgets.
- Childcare grossly underfunded in Scotland and mainstream public funding reducing – yet pressure for parents to work means demand will continue to grow. Shortage of places pushing market price of childcare up, along with extra costs of compliance with increased legislation.

#### **High cost of childcare prohibitive**

- Rising costs - £300-750 full time place per month - prohibitive/disincentive
- Barriers multiply if several children or additional special needs

- If parents work under 16 hours, childcare costs neither affordable or sustainable; yet part time work/study often first step back to work when children are young.
- Many more subsidised childcare places needed to get parents back to work (Scotland compares badly with other Euro countries)

### **More integrated childcare pathways**

- More integrated approach needed to support transitions through children's services/educational process (toddlers, private/public pre-school nursery, After School club, Primary/Secondary, Holiday Play-scheme etc).
- More linkage would reduce disruption for families (including financial) and offer higher levels of service and protection and help sustain jobs/training.
- Schools need to take more collaborative and responsible role in wider childcare eg providing accommodation for pre school/afterschool childcare services. (recent examples of schools 'taking back' premises and displacing pre school/after school care)
- Would assist with forward planning if schools annually survey families to assess what out of school/pre school childcare provision is required.
- Needs to be equal focus on the quality as well as flexibility of childcare.

### **Provision for Parents in training**

- Childcare provision needs to underpin aims of new Scottish Skills strategy
- Review( at national level) of childcare provision for parents in training/FE/HE needed (see below)  
Government (and Inspectorate) should oblige FE/HE and National Prevocational Training Progs (eg Training for Work) to offer more family friendly course timetables and childcare provision (see below)

### **Benefits System – traps and barriers**

- Complexity/inflexibility of Benefits systems is UK/DWP issue - Scottish government/City Strategy needs to influence Whitehall/Sheffield so that when parents do enter employment they are not financially worse off.
- Need to streamline/simplify benefits with family in mind
- Issues around tax credits not kicking in until the parent working 16 hours thus can't get childcare help.
- Levels of funding available for childcare should reflect level of need of the family, e.g. if a child has special care needs, should attract increased benefits.

## How does childcare impact on helping your clients access training or employment?

### **Affordability (prohibitive costs a key barrier)**

- Need for strategic approach to subsidised community childcare to ensure disadvantaged parents get a service that is not post-code driven and which relies heavily on community activism to establish and maintain it. Parents cannot access training or employment without this kind of support. Policy and pricing structures shouldn't be left solely to the private sector to lead on.
- Inflexibility of funding criteria also presents many barriers

### **Coordination of services**

- Mismatch between the provision of childcare, i.e. breakfast clubs, weekends provision, out of school clubs, etc and timing of training or employment opportunities. If no provision parents will not be able to access training or employment.
- Transport provision (to access childcare) a key issue. Complex challenges for parents with several children, requiring different provision.
- Need to raise awareness of referring agencies, notably Jobcentre Plus, of lead time needed to set up childcare provision.
- **Much greater investment needed in subsidised places/more strategic approach to provision**

### **Access to work/employment**

- Employers need to build relationships with childcare/employment support sector
- Employers must be geared up to support parents.
- Range of flexible work options for parents needed eg home working, different patterns of work depending on stage and needs of children.
- Education for employers – more awareness of legislation
- Need to share more good practice models and case studies

### **Access to training /education**

- Many gaps in childcare provision/funding for parents who attend Further/Higher Education and other training. Funded childcare places fall far short of demand, and funding commonly runs out before the end of the academic year so parents have to leave courses midway. More 'on campus' childcare facilities would also save complex journeys/travel costs for parents to access childcare.
- More flexibility in pre-employment training programmes to reflect the needs of parents. eg Training for Work gives no allowance for holiday provision unless it is recorded as authorised absence, which disadvantages those with school age children. Childcare funding under TFW lasts 26 weeks but some vocational programmes require 10 months to gain necessary qualifications.

## What are your thoughts on the DWP Green Paper proposal to reduce the age at which lone parents should be expected to seek work?

- Prior to any legislation being passed, adequate and affordable childcare needs to be in place. Not reasonable to change rules and force parents to access employment if no available childcare provision.
- More stable, family friendly, jobs with prospects needed for parents – low paid, insecure, shift work will not be sustainable, help lift families out of poverty/deprivation, or make childcare affordable.
- Early engagement with disadvantaged parents a good idea but ‘big stick’ compulsion approach not helpful.
- Can employers be incentivised, i.e. a reduction of corporation tax, to either provide childcare on-site or to adopt more family friendly policies, such as job-sharing or term-time employment?
- Worries about parental choice – what about parents who want to bring up their child/children. Need to have flexibility for when family situations/demands change.
- If parents can no longer choose to raise children risk further undermining ‘family values’. Increasing child benefit/carers allowances should be considered to make stay at home parenting an affordable option.
- Key point that not all children comply to a standard (eg at age 7 or 11) and that situations for children change. While working may be manageable for a parent with a younger child, as that child develops or more children come along, additional support needs/demands on the family may emerge which make work a less manageable option for a parent.
- Need family centred support systems in place for all who need it.
- Why single out single parents, not children in couple families?
- Essential to have childcare provision to accommodate range of working patterns, plus take into account the limited skills, qualification levels and potential work options for the most disadvantaged parents. This is critical if extending the age limit for children of lone parents.
- Core business funding required for childcare services so that voluntary sector agencies can focus time on service delivery instead of fundraising.
- Need more forward planning to anticipate changes resulting from welfare and other government reforms. Research needs to be done now to inform this.

- Any benefit savings from lone parents entering work should be channelled into childcare.
- Need to also look at what works in other European models where subsidised childcare support for working parents is used to enable economic growth.